

THE RIGHT MOTIVE FOR GIVING

MATHEW 06:01–04

Introduction — The Right Motive

What a man does matters greatly to God. God expects men to be kind and to do good in the world: to help others both through personal involvement and through giving generously and sacrificially.

But there is something else that God expects, something of critical importance: God expects a man to have *the right motive*. Just why a man does good and shows kindness matters greatly to God. It matters so much that a person's eternal fate is determined by his motive. Because of this, Christ warns us about right and wrong motives.

- I. Acts of righteousness — doing good and giving (v. 1).
- II. The wrong motive: Giving for recognition (v. 2).
- III. The right motive (vv. 3-4).

MATHEW 06:1–18 CHRISTIAN DUTY

Christ discussed the three great duties of religion to a Jew — acts of righteousness (Mt. 6:1-4), prayer (Mt. 6:5-15), and fasting (Mt. 6:16-18). His concern was threefold:

- 1. That men give, pray, and fast.
- 2. That men do these works with the *right motive* and *guard against hypocrisy* when doing them.
- 3. That men receive their *reward* from God the Father. □

I. Mathew 06:01 Acts of Righteousness

There are acts of righteousness — doing good and giving to others. The phrase “acts of righteousness” means giving in order to meet the needs of the poor. To the Jew, acts of righteousness and righteousness meant the same thing. Doing righteous acts was the greatest thing a Jew could do; it was the first act of religion. It was considered to be the very embodiment of righteousness, so much so that the two words began to be used synonymously. Giving acts of righteousness merited and assured one of righteousness and salvation.

Christ does not say, “Blessed are the righteous,” for no one is righteous (Rom 3:10). He says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” (Mat 5:6). Man is not righteous, not perfectly righteous. His chance to be righteous is gone. He has already come short and missed the mark. He is already imperfect. Man has but one hope: that God will love him so much that He will somehow *count* him righteous. That is just what God does.

God takes a man's "hunger and thirst for righteousness" and counts that hunger and thirst as righteousness. God does this because He loves man.

Christ warned that there is great danger in giving and doing acts of righteousness. Take heed and guard yourself. Do not give for recognition or you will lose your reward.

Thought 1. There are two important messages in this verse.

- 1) Man must guard and be alert to the deception of giving and doing good before men. A person's heart can be deceived. The sin creeps up on man; it is insidious and subtle. It will keep a person from receiving anything from God.
- 2) A person must do righteous acts, do good. It is the duty of a Christian. In this passage alone Christ says four times, "Do your acts of righteousness."

II. *Mathew 06:02 The Wrong Motive*

There is the wrong motive for doing good. Christ takes for granted that the believer gives and does good. What Christ strikes at is the motive of the human heart for giving and doing good.

1. Giving for recognition is the wrong motive for giving. Recognition is said to be sought by blowing one's own horn in two places: (a) in the synagogue before religious people, and (b) in the streets before the public.

Thought 1. There are several wrong motives for giving and doing good.

- 1) A person may give for recognition and prestige: to be praised by men during life and to be remembered by men after death. A person may desire the applause of men — their thanks and appreciation, honour and praise, esteem and glory.
- 2) A person may give for self-admiration, self-satisfaction and self-applause: to feel comfortable with what he has done and to see himself at his very best. He may wish to boost his ego and to glory in himself.
- 3) A person may give out of obligation: to fulfil his sense of duty.
- 4) A person may give to secure the recognition of God: to feel that God is pleased and favours him because he has done good.

Thought 2. It is not always wrong to do acts of righteousness when men see us. This cannot always be helped. It is wrong to do acts of righteousness *so that* men may see us.

Thought 3. The point is not that a person should hold back from doing good, but he should guard against how he gives and does good.

Mat 23:5 *"Everything they do is done for men to see. They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long."*

Luke 20:46 *“Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets.”*

2. Giving for recognition is characteristic of hypocrites. Giving out of the wrong motive is hypocritical. The word *hypocrite* (hupokrites) means an actor who puts on a show, who plays a part on stage; a mask, a fake picture; appearing to be something one is not.
 - a. It is *sounding a trumpet before oneself* (v. 2): blowing one’s own horn for self praise.
 - b. It is *sounding a trumpet in the synagogue*: blowing one’s own horn in the church and before the religious; it is seeking the praise of the religious (v. 2).
 - c. It is *sounding a trumpet in the streets*: blowing one’s own horn before the public, seeking the praise of the public (v. 2).

Mat 23:12 *“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”*

John 5:44 *“How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”*

Prov 17:9 *He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.*

Prov 25:27 *It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honourable to seek one’s own honour.*

Oba 1:4 *“Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD.*

3. Giving for recognition is rewarded on this earth only. A person receives the recognition of men only. There are two rewards for a wrong motive: the recognition of men and temporary self-satisfaction. Note the words, “They have received their reward in full.” This is an accounting statement: it means just what it says — payment has been made in full. One has received his payment and reward; he has received all he will ever receive. There is to be no reward — no reward whatsoever — from God.

Thought 1. The person who gives out of a wrong motive fails in several points.

- 1) He fails to give “of himself”. He gives money and he gives things, but he calculates exactly what he can give in order to meet the need. He never becomes personally involved. He never gives of himself.
- 2) He seldom puts the need or the needy person first. Satisfying his own motive and having his own need met is put first.

- 3) He is always hurt, disappointed, unhappy and sometimes even angry if his giving is not recognized and praised.
- 4) He is never permanently satisfied with what has been done. Why? Because Christ and the genuine giving of himself is the only permanent satisfaction for the human heart.
- 5) He has accepted the recognition that lasts only briefly. The prestige and honour, thanks and praise of men is only temporary.
 - a) The man who gives in this life soon fades in the memory of men. His giving fades into the background. Men move on to other things.
 - b) Once gone, the man who gave in this life knows nothing of the thoughts and words spoken on his behalf. He stands only before God, accountable to Him alone.

Thought 2. Three things can be said about the person who chooses man's reward over God's reward: (1) he has chosen the poorest reward; (2) he has cheated himself; and (3) he can expect no more. What a terrible fate! To have no more reward than what this world offers. Imagine! No hope and no expectation of a better future - nothing beyond this world.

1 Pet 1:24 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall."

Psa 49:12 But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.

Psa 49:17 For he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendour will not descend with him.

Isa 5:14 Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers.

Hosea 4:7 The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful.

III. Mathew 06: 03–04 The Right Motive

What is the right motive for doing good and for giving? "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." What a descriptive way to say it!

1. Give unconsciously. Pay no attention to what you are giving and doing. Do it out of an inner compulsion to give and help, out of intense love, out of genuine concern. Keep your mind on the need, not on what you are doing and the benefits you may receive. Do not harbour such self-centered thoughts. Just love and care and be concerned as you give and do good.

2. Give secretly, quietly, privately. Do not let others know what you are giving and doing. Keep it quiet — say nothing. Keep a low profile: stay out of the centre ring of applause; avoid recognition if possible. Fleeing recognition is critical. The other members of a person's body — his hand, that is, his family — must not even know.

What is so desperately needed is a realistic view of the world. The world is a place of pain and suffering and sin and death — a world that needs to be saved and brought somehow to a state of incorruption. When a person faces the real truth of the world, he forgets himself and sets out to meet the needs of the world through the power of Christ. There is just no time for becoming entangled in the affairs of this world and seeking the applause of men. There is only time to minister. Taking time to applaud one another means there is another need that is going to be unmet.

There is only one right motive for giving and doing acts of righteousness: to help those in need.

- => A person knows and lives with an awareness of the misery, misfortune, and desperate plight of the world.
- => A person loves and cares so much that he *wishes* to help those who need help.
- => A person literally *throws himself* into meeting the needs of the world and helping all he can.

Thought 1. There are three forceful lessons in this point.

- 1) A person is to be immersed in God and in the needs of the world. There is no time for centring attention upon himself if he wishes his life to be focused on God and to be spent saving his world.
- 2) There is only one way the needs of the world will be met: we must all get out into the world where the needs are. There is no time for the right hand to be explaining and receiving applause from the left hand.
- 3) The servant of God is to be obsessed with his call and ministry to the world. He does not become entangled with the affairs of this world and the applause of men. He quietly and diligently goes about pouring himself into helping others (2 Tim. 2:4).

Mat 19:21 *Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

Luke 11:41 *"But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you."*

Luke 19:8 *But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."*

Luke 12:23 *“Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.”*

Lev 25:35 *“If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you.”*

Deu 15:7 *If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother.*

Deu 16:17 *Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.*

Prov 31: 20 *She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.*

There are two reasons for doing good quietly and secretly.

1. God sees in secret. God sees secret giving and secret acts of righteousness or deeds. Nothing passes His attention. He knows the motive and the acts of every man, every single motive and every single act.

Jer 17:10 *“I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”*

Jer 23:24 *“Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the LORD. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the LORD.*

Nahum 1:7 *The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.*

1 Cor 8:3 *But the man who loves God is known by God*

Thought 1. Note the words “Your Father.” If God is truly a person’s Father, then the person must give and do good just as his Father dictates. *Anything less is disobedience and displeasing.*

2. God rewards openly. Note the words, “[God] will reward you.”
 - a. It is God Himself who will reward a person.
 - b. It is to be an open reward — a reward seen by all. A person is to have a personal moment before God when He shall receive his reward. This is the picture painted by Christ.

Thought 1. The faithful person will be rewarded as a son, not as a servant. *His Father, not his Master, will reward him.*

1 Cor 9:17 *If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.*

1 Cor 15:58 *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

2 Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

2 Tim 4:7-8 *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

2 John 1:8 *Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.*

Rev 22:12 *“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”*

Psa 19:9,11 *The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous....By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

Psa 58:11 *Then men will say, “Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth.”*

Isa 40:10 *See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.*

Isa 62:11 *The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your Saviour comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.’”*

Jer 17:10 *“I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”*

Jer 23:24 *Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the LORD. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the LORD. ■*

THE RIGHT MOTIVE FOR PRAYER

MATHEW 06:05–06

Introduction — Motive for Prayer

This passage is speaking to *those who pray* — people who take prayer seriously. Prayer is one of the greatest acts of the Christian believer. Talking to God, whether by thought or tongue, is the way a believer fellowships with God; and the one thing God desires is fellowship with man (Isa. 43:10). Thus, it is essential that we pray and pray often, communicating all day long with God.

However, that we *do* pray is not the concern of Christ at this point. His concern is *how* we pray. It is possible to pray amiss, with the wrong motive and in the wrong way. It is possible to pray and never be heard by God. It is possible to pray and to be speaking only to ourselves, to have our prayer go no higher than our own ears. Therefore, Christ sets out to teach us the right and wrong motives for praying.

- I. The wrong motive: praying to be seen by men (v. 5).
- II. The right motive: praying to be heard by God (v. 6).

MATHEW 06:05–06 DANGERS SURROUNDING PRAYER

There are dangers surrounding prayer, some negative factors that must be guarded against.

1. Prayer can become hypocritical (v. 5). A person can pray for the wrong reasons, with the wrong motives.
2. Prayer can become habit-forming (v. 5). Prayer is a wonderful experience, very rewarding emotionally and mentally and in having our needs met as God answers our prayer. We can begin to *love praying* and still be praying amiss.
3. Prayer can become connected with certain places (v. 5). A believer has places that mean much to him in his prayer life, but he must guard against limiting God's presence only to those places, even if it is the church.
4. Prayer can become empty repetition (v. 7). A person can take any phrase or form of prayer and make it a meaningful experience, or make it a formal and meaningless occasion. (Note how often the Lord's Prayer is repeated by rote memory with the mind focused elsewhere.)
5. Prayer can become too long (v. 7). A believer can begin to feel he is heard because of "many words" (Eccl. 5:1-2).
6. Prayer can become self-glorifying (v. 8). A person can begin to feel he must inform and convince God of his *great* need. When the answer comes (out of the

mercy of God, despite praying amiss), the believer begins to *glory in his spirituality* — that he has what it takes to get things from God.

7. Prayer can become self-deceptive (vv. 7-8). A person can begin to think he is heard (1) because of “many words” and (2) because he convinces God of his need. □

MATHEW 06:05–06 WARNING ABOUT PRAYER

Note the things Jesus says about prayer.

1. Christ says “When you pray.” He is referring to personal prayer (v. 6).
2. Christ assumes that the believer does pray, and the idea conveyed is that the believer prays often.
3. Christ says there is a right way and a wrong way to pray. “When you pray, do not...” vs. “But when you pray....”
4. Christ says that some “love to pray,” and they are the very ones who commit this fault. They pray amiss, with the wrong motive.
5. Christ pictures two men praying. One man prays to men (v. 5); the other man prays to the Father (v. 6). The first man is a hypocrite; the second man is a true son of the Father. □

MATHEW 06:05–06 SIGNIFIANCE OF PRAYER

Believers are expected to pray. Prayer is God’s appointed medium through which He acts for man. *Sharing and talking* together are the way all persons communicate, have fellowship and commune together. This is true both with men and God. Prayer requires our presence, sharing and talking; and God wants to have fellowship and commune with us. Few persons heed this fact; few persons take prayer seriously. Therefore, if we want the blessings of God upon our lives and ministries — if we want the work of God going forth in power and bearing fruit — we must pray and we must intercede in prayer.

Mat 6:6 “*But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*” (see Mat 6:7).

Mat 6:9 “*This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’*”

Mat 26:41 “*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.*” (see Mark 13:33; 14:38; Luke 21:36; 22:40,46)

Luke 18:1 *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*

Eph 6:18 *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

1 Th 5:17 *Pray continually.*

1 Tim 2:8 *I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. □*

I. Mathew 06:05 The Wrong Motive for Prayer

The wrong motive for prayer is praying to be seen by men. Two preliminary things need to be looked at before discussing this point.

1. Praying — even loving to pray — is not a sign that a person really knows God.
2. The fact that a person really knows God means that he does pray. No matter what a man may think in his mind, if he really knows God and really believes in God, he talks to God. There is nothing that could keep him from praying. He knows God personally — knows Him as his Father who loves and cares for him ever so deeply. Therefore, just as any child who truly loves his father, the believer talks, converses, and shares with his Father. This says something to the person who prays primarily in public and prays little, if any, in private. He must search the genuineness of his heart and profession.

Christ says that a man who prays to be seen by men *loves to pray, but he is a hypocrite*.

1. The places where he *loves to pray* are *out in public*, in the synagogue (church), and in the streets (restaurants, and other public places).

Thought 1. Five facts about prayer.

- 1) Some love to pray publicly. They love representing the group and vocalizing their praise and needs to God. Some have become very charismatic and fluent at public prayer, yet they lack that essential love for private praying. Christ says, “hypocrite” (v. 5).
- 2) Some pray only in public. They pray before their family (at meals and family prayers, usually with children); in church (when called upon); and in public (when eating in restaurants). They seldom, if ever, pray in private. How destitute is the prayer life of so many!
- 3) Prayer is to be offered to God both in church and in public. But public prayer is to be public, not private. Too often a person has his *personal devotions* when called upon to pray publicly. He has neglected his *private prayers* and his inner need has

not been met. Thus when he begins to pray publicly, he slips into praying his own *private prayer* instead of representing the group.

- 4) Some hypocrites pray, and they pray much. There are some *religious people* who pray little, if any. These can learn from the hypocrites.
- 5) Note the posture of this hypocrite. He stood praying. This is an acceptable posture for prayer (Mk. 11:25); but the picture is that of pride, arrogance, and self-confidence. Kneeling is a picture of humility, reverence, and dependence upon God (Lk. 22:41; Eph. 3:14).

Rom 12:16 *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

Gal 6:3 *If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

1 John 2:16 *For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

Hab 2:4 *“See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright — but the righteous will live by his faith.”*

2. The man who prays only in public prays for only one reason: not because he loves to pray but because he loves recognition.

Thought 1. Note two lessons.

- 1) The sin is not failing to pray. The sin is praying *only* in church and in public. A person who prays publicly but seldom prays privately fools himself. Christ says real prayer (prayer to the Father) matters nothing to that person. He prays only for recognition — to be heard by men.
- 2) Praying publicly should be done. There is a great danger, however, in public prayer: having one's pride stroked. It is so easy to be praying publicly and have self-centered thoughts run across one's mind.
 - => That one is really praying a good prayer. Such prayer is nothing but waxing eloquent with words.
 - => That one's prayer will surely be admired.
 - => That one's prayer is really demonstrating a close walk with God (a deep spirituality).

Mat 15:7-8 *“You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”*

1 Cor 8:2 *The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.*

Prov 11:2 *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*

Prov 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Isa 5:21 *Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.*

3. The man who prays only in public receives his reward: public recognition. Three things need to be clearly seen about this man.
 - a. He will experience good feelings and satisfying thoughts about his spiritual state and religious piety. He will possess a good self-image and some confidence in his standing with God. The esteem and praise of men and feeling good about what he has done gives him a good self image. *But* in this case it is a false self-image.
 - b. He has cheated himself, really missed out on the most intimate presence and greatest future in the universe. He has lost his soul. He shall never hear, “Well done thou good and faithful servant” (Mt. 25:21).
 - c. He gets just what he deserves: public recognition. If he places so little value upon sharing himself with God, he deserves no more than what man can give him — human recognition.

Thought 1. Man’s esteem fails at several points.

- 1) Man’s esteem is temporary. Everything passes — ever so quickly. Man soon forgets and moves on to other things.
- 2) Man’s esteem becomes commonplace. Even the greatest skills that elicit praise become routine and commonplace to man when performed day by day. Soon man no longer acknowledges his uniqueness. Such abilities are merely expected and accepted; he no longer elicits praise and recognition.
- 3) Man’s esteem is powerless. It cannot answer prayer; it can only recognize man’s ability to put words together and to see man’s expression, fervency and emotion. Its power is limited to the things of this world, and that power is even limited and short lived. Man’s esteem can do absolutely nothing about the spiritual needs of his heart.
- 4) Man’s esteem is not to be the judge of his life — God is. No man is any greater than any other man; men are mere men. All men have the same need: to turn to God in prayer, praying for His acceptance and recognition. Therefore, the esteem of man *by men* is meaningless in the light of judgment and eternity.

1 Pet 1:24 *For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall.”*

Psa 49:12 *But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.*

Psa 49:17 *For he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendour will not descend with him.*

Hosea 4:7 *The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful.*

II. Mathew 06:06 The Right Motive for Prayer

The right motive for prayer is praying to be heard by God. Three preliminary things need to be looked at in this point.

1. The willingness to take time to pray: “When you pray.” There has to be the will to pray. The believer must take time to get alone to pray. Too few ever take time to pray, and even fewer spend more than a few minutes in prayer. Too many stay all wrapped up in the world and its day-to-day affairs, some of which are necessary, but how much more necessary is prayer!
2. A closet is a necessity. The believer must have a private place deliberately chosen for prayer.
3. A personal relationship with God: a *Father-son* relationship is absolutely essential. God is our *Father*; He is available as fathers are available to their children. We are to go to Him, pray, share, commune and let Him shower us with His care and protection and meet our every need (Psa. 91:1).

Note: Christ says that a man who is genuine prays to be heard by God and not by men.

1. The place he chooses for prayer is in his private closet. Christ says: “Get alone”; “Go into your room... close the door.” Be unobserved, undisturbed and unheard. (2 Kng. 4:33; Isa. 26:20.)
 - a. *Get alone*: unobserved — out of everyone’s sight.
 - b. *Get alone*: undisturbed — avoid interruptions and disturbances.
 - c. *Get alone*: unheard — concentrate and meditate to allow God the freedom to work in your heart as He wishes.

Acts 10:9 *About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.*

Acts 10:30 *Cornelius answered: “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me.”*

Mat 6:6 *“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

Mark 1:35 *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*

Mark 6:46-47 *After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land.*

Luke 6:12 *One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.*

Luke 22:41-42 *He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*

2. The reason the believer prays in his private closet is because God is in secret or unseen. Note two significant facts.
 - a. God "is unseen"; therefore, a person can meet God only in *secret*. Even in the midst of a worshipping crowd, a person must concentrate and focus his attention upon God who is unseen. There must be a secret heart-to-heart meeting and communion if a person wishes to pray and truly share with God.
 - b. God "is unseen"; therefore, He is not interested in show, but in substance. Show is before men. Substance is found in the secret, quiet, meditative place. Remember: everything that exists began with an idea, and the development of the idea came from *private and quiet thought and meditation*, not out in the public before people — at least not often. The same is true of spiritual matters. Spiritual show takes place before people, but spiritual substances or qualities that really matter take place in secret. When the believer pours out his heart, he receives his greatest encouragement and strength in the secret place of the Most High, not in the public places of mere men.

Thought 1. Many pray on the run; few pray in secret. Why do so few have a quiet time, a daily worship and devotional time? Why do so few keep their daily appointment with God? This is one of the most difficult things in the world to understand in light of who God is and in light of man's desperate plight and need. No man would ever fail to keep his appointment with the state leader of his nation.

- 1) Many say they do not have the time, so they do not take the time. But in all honesty, it takes only a little effort to get up a little earlier in the morning — if they are really all that pressed for time. All they need to do is to rearrange their schedule to allow for a quiet time just as they arrange for any other important meeting. However, few do this; therefore, they are without excuse. Many believers are faithful in meeting God daily. It is just a matter of discipline and priority.
- 2) Most have the time; they just do not take the time. They neglect getting alone with God consistently.

- 3) Many have not been taught the importance and benefit of a quiet time with God every day. This is a justified accusation against Christian parents, preachers and teachers. So few have practiced and stressed what they have always heard about the importance of prayer. The silence of believers and their failure to reach the world in sound doctrine is unbelievable, especially after two thousand years.
 - 4) Some have not yet learned to discipline themselves and to be consistent in their spiritual lives. There is no better area to learn discipline and consistency than in a daily quiet time. A person should just begin and do it. When a day is missed, a person should flee discouragement, “forgetting what is behind,” and reach forth to a new day and begin again. Eventually, consistency and discipline will be learned, and the person’s soul will be fed with the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8, 20; see Phil. 3:13).
3. The reward of the genuine prayer warrior is open blessings. The praying believer will be rewarded in two very special ways.
 - a. The strength and presence of God will be upon his life (Ezr. 8:22; 1 Pet. 5:6). God’s presence is unmistakable. There is a difference between a person who walks in God’s presence and a life that walks only in this world (Mt. 6:25-34, esp. 33). God rewards the praying believer with His presence and blessings. The believer’s needs, material and spiritual, are met day by day.
 - b. The believer’s prayers will also be answered (Mt. 21:22; Jn. 16:24; 1 Jn. 5:14-15). The answers to prayer are clearly seen by a thinking and honest observer. God has promised to answer the true prayer of a genuine believer. God takes care of the genuine believer with a very special care. Sometimes the answer is seen in a renewed strength

Eph 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us

- in a provision of some necessity.

Mat 6:33 “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

- in a conquest of some great temptation or trial.

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

- in a peace that passes and transcends all human understanding.

Phil 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- in self-discipline that is incomprehensible.

2 Tim 1:7 *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

Thought 1. The praying believer, the believer who becomes a true intercessor, will be rewarded openly on that special day of redemption.

- 1) God “was appalled that there was no one to make an intercession [no intercessor]” (Isa. 59:16).
- 2) Christ, the Great Intercessor, “always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:25).
- 3) The interceding believer shall stand openly in a very special relationship with Jesus, the Great Intercessor Himself, before God the Father.

Mat 21:22 *“If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”*

Luke 11:9 *“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

John 14:13-14 *“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”*

John 15:7 *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”*

John 16:24 *“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”*

1 John 3:22 *And receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.*

1 John 5:14-15 *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him. ■*

MATHEW 06:06 PRAYING IN SECRET

Prayer is to be done secretly. The believer is to get by himself and pray to God secretly. This means three things:

1. Concentration is needed: meditation, contemplation, thinking deeply upon God and sharing accordingly.
2. A person must get alone, apart from all else: secluded, private, out of view from all.
3. God is unseen: invisible, yet there. A person must believe and have faith that God is there. God is Spirit, but He still hears and responds. Every believer should have a secret, quiet place that is dear to his heart, dear because it is the place where he draws near to God and God draws near to him. □

JOHN 01:48 FIG TREE AND WORSHIP

*“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” **John 01:48***

In Palestine the fig tree stood for peace, security, rest and worship (1 Kng. 4:25; Mica. 4:4). Very often a man would seek solitude and worship under his fig tree. No doubt this is what Nathanael had been doing. When Jesus told Nathanael that He had seen him under his fig tree, He was telling Nathanael that He knew everything about him, even the deepest longings of his heart. Jesus knew Nathanael’s despair and sense of hopelessness; He knew his longing for peace and release and freedom. That was enough to cause Nathanael to give his life to Jesus forever. □

THE THREE GREAT RULES FOR PRAYER

MATHEW 06:07–08

Introduction

Among the religious there is often a tendency toward long prayers, particularly in public. Too often people measure prayer by its fluency and length, thinking that length means devotion. “Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God” (Eccl 5:2). Christ puts the matter very simply, yet strongly: “When you pray,” follow three great rules.

- I. Rule 1: do not use meaningless repetition (v. 7).
- II. Rule 2: do not speak much (v. 7).
- III. Rule 3: trust God (v. 8).

I. *Mathew 06:07 Repetitive Prayer*

The first great rule of prayer is striking — do not use empty repetition (see *Repetitive Prayer*, Mt. 6:7). There are several things that lend themselves to empty repetition.

1. Memorized prayer: just saying the words of a form prayer, for example, the Lord’s prayer. There is nothing wrong with praying a memorized prayer, but it should be prayed through and not just repeated with no thought behind the words.
 2. Written, well-worded prayers: thinking that what we say is so expressive and so well worded that it is bound to carry weight with God. The words may be descriptive and beautifully arranged, but the heart must be offering the prayer, not the mind and ego. Such prayer is empty repetition.
 3. Ritual prayer: saying the same prayer at the same time on the same occasion — over and over again. This can soon become empty repetition.
 4. Formal worship: praying in the same way on a rigid schedule can lead to praying by habit (repeated practice) with little or no meaning to it.
 5. Thoughtless prayer: speaking words while our minds are wandering. Being tired is no excuse. It is better not to pray than to pray insincerely.
 6. Religious words and phrases: using certain words or phrases over and over in prayer (just because they are religious sounding). (Compare using such words over and over as *mercy, grace, I thank thee O God, in Jesus’ name.*)
 7. Habitual references to God: using such empty repetition as “Lord this,” and “Lord that,” and “Lord here,” and “Lord there,” and “Lord...,” “Lord...,” “Lord....” How little thought is really given to approaching Him whose name is “Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6).
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There are several things that will keep us from using empty repetition in prayer:

- A genuine heart: really knowing God personally and having a moment-by-moment fellowship with Him all day long.
- Thought and concentration: really focusing upon what we are saying.
- Desire for fellowship with God: praying sincerely, really meaning it.
- Preparation: preparing ourselves for prayer by first meditating in God's Word.

Note something of extreme importance in discussing "babbling" repetition. Christ does not say repetition in prayer is wrong. It is not wrong. What is wrong is vain, empty, meaningless, foolish repetition. Christ Himself used repetition in prayer (Mt. 26:44), so did Daniel (Dan 9:18-19), and so did the Psalmist (Psa 136:1f).

Thought 1. Note six lessons.

- 1) There is one major problem with the praying of believers: they do not pray enough. They do not take enough time to pray and to pray in earnest. There is one major problem *when believers do pray*, prayer is often vain, empty, thoughtless, meaningless and repetitive. Too often a believer prays and does not concentrate. His mind wanders off somewhere else; he only mouths the words. Such thoughtless and meaningless prayer is clearly seen in public prayer and in the powerlessness of believers today.

- 2) There is one sure way to prepare our hearts for prayer: meditating in God's Word.

2 Tim 3:16 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*

It is in the Scripture that the believer learns about God, himself, and the world — the nature and truth of all things. It is the Spirit of God who takes the Word of God and moves upon the believer's heart revealing that for which the believer should pray. Therefore, the believer is stirred to pray for whatever the Word of God and the Spirit of God has shown him (Rom 8:26; see Jn. 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor 2:12-13).

- 3) Meaningless repetition in prayer, whether formal or thoughtless, is *desensitizing*.

=> It discourages the sincere and the newly converted.

=> It cools the willing and the gifted.

=> It stifles the committed and the mature.

=> It turns away the seeking and the lost.

- 4) Repetition in prayer *is* dull. Empty repetition affects worship, interest, and attendance at services.

- 5) Meaningless repetition is tragic. Prayer should be one of the most meaningful experiences in life. God is certainly willing to meet the believer in a very special way — anytime, anyplace. So many hearts are just...

- barren • lethargic • dull
- desert-like • complacent • rusted
- dry • still • hard

So much praying is merely going over and over the same things ranging from “bless Mom and Dad” to “give us a good day tomorrow.”

- 6) Empty repetition turns God away and cuts the heart of the committed.

2 Tim 3:5 Having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

Mat 15:7-8 “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”

MATHEW 06:07

PRAYER; MEANINGLESS REPETITION (BATTOLOGESETE)

To babble much; to use many phrases; to say idle things; to say meaningless things. Meaningless repetition means at least two things.

1. It means saying the same words over and over again without putting one’s heart and thought into what is being said.
2. It means using certain religious words or phrases (sometimes over and over again) and thinking God hears because one is using such religious talk. □

II. *Mathew 06:07 Long Prayers*

The second great rule of prayer is an eye-opener — do not speak much. Too many think that length equals devotion; that is, the longer they pray the more God will listen to them (they are showing God their sincerity), and the more spiritual they will become.

God does not hear a person’s prayer because it is long, but because his heart is genuinely poured out to God. Length has nothing to do with devotion, but a sincere heart does.

Long prayers are not forbidden. What is forbidden is the idea that long prayers are automatically heard by God. Christ prayed all night (Lk 6:12). The early disciples prayed and fasted, and sought God for ten days and nights waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1f). A believer should sense the needs of the world so much that he is driven to seek God and His intervention for long periods of time, and the seeking should be often (Eph 6:18).

Why do some pray long prayers?

1. Some feel long prayers convince God. They feel God has to be moved, nudged and stirred to hear and answer.
2. Some feel they need long prayers to explain the situation. They feel God needs to be informed and made to understand a particular situation and how it has affected them.
3. Some feel long prayers make them more spiritual, more mature and more devoted.
4. Some feel long prayers are just demanded of believers. It is expected; it is the religious and godly thing to do.
5. Some feel long prayers show God their sincerity. They secure God's approval by long prayers.
6. Some feel long prayers impress people. They show people just how deeply spiritual they really are.

What are ways to prevent the sins that arise from long prayers?

Eccl 5:2 Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

- “Do not be quick with your mouth.” Control your mouth. Do not let your mouth rattle on and on without thought. It will often rush and hurry with every thought that crosses your mind.
- Do not be “hasty in your heart to utter anything before God”: sit still, be quiet, without saying a word for a while. Do not rush forward to speak.
- Think about who God is. Picture a man: his mouth is quiet; he has been still for some time. He has been preparing, gaining control of his mind and thoughts so he can appear before the Sovereign Majesty of the universe. He focuses his thoughts upon God, the One who is in heaven far above the earth. He meditates upon God's sovereignty and majesty. God is the centre of his thoughts (Psa 46:10).
- “Let your words be few.” Speak — but make your words deliberate — just as deliberate as the words of any interviewer before a sovereign ruler. Request — just as any obedient son would request of a revered father. The person who approaches God like this speaks with respect and thought, with care and love. He speaks few words and straight to the point — all from a prepared heart and mind.

When should the believer spend a long time in prayer? There *are* special times when an extended prayer time is necessary. Some of the times are clearly seen in Scripture.

1. Sometimes a special pull to praise and adore God is felt within. When the believer feels this pull, he should get alone, spending a long time praising and worshipping God (see Acts 16:25).

2. Sometimes a special need arises. This may be the believer's own need or a friend's need. He should intercede until God gives the assurance that the need will be met (Eph 6:18; see Acts 12:1-5, esp. v. 5).
3. Sometimes an unusual experience or event has taken place or is about to take place in the believer's life or ministry. He should get alone and share the event with God. And he should stay before God until the experience has taken place (courage, confidence, power, faith, love). (See Introduction, Mt. 4:1-11.)
4. Sometimes a great trial or temptation is faced. A long session of prayer may be needed to gain strength and to keep the believer away from the trial or temptation. (See *Temptation of Jesus*, Mt. 4:1-11.)
5. Sometimes a matter needs to be worked through or a major decision needs to be made. Help and direction should be sought from God. God should be acknowledged in all of the believer's ways. He should remain before God until the answer is given. (See Acts 13:1-3, esp. 2.)

Thought 1. Prayer is a matter of the heart, not a matter of words and length. Praying is sharing; it is sharing with God just like a person shares with any other person. Just as he shares thoughts, feelings, praise and requests with others, so he shares with God.

Thought 2. Prayer is a personal relationship. Prayer is not speaking into thin air. God may be "unseen" (v. 6); He may be invisible, but He is there. He is there more than any other person who may be in our presence. He is the One whom all men are to know and to whom all men are to be vitally related. Too often, the awareness and consciousness of His presence are allowed to fade, and we just go through our long prayer with a wandering mind leaping from thought to thought. Long prayers lend themselves to this danger. How insincere! How irreverent! How often the heart of God must be cut and hurt!

Thought 3. There are prayers of believers and prayers of the heathen. A distinction is made by Christ Himself. He says that both pray.

- 1) The heathen pray using meaningless repetition and speaking empty words.
- 2) The believer is vitally related to God; therefore, he prays to God who is his Father. He prays to God just as a son shares with his revered father.

Mat 6:7 "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Eccl 6:7 All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.

III. *Mathew 06:08 Prayer*

The third great rule of prayer is forceful — trust God.

1. God knows the believer's need even before the believer asks. Why then should the believer pray?

Prayer demonstrates our need for God and our dependence upon God. Prayer gives time for concentrated sharing and communion between the believer and God. It is not enough for man to carry a knowledge of God in his mind as he walks through life. Man needs to have times when he is in the presence of God and can concentrate his thoughts and fellowship upon God. He needs such time with God just as he needs such time with his family and friends. Man is not meant to live in isolation from people nor from God. He must have times when he is in the presence of both man and God and can concentrate his thoughts and attention upon both.

The believer, therefore, does not pray only to have his needs met but to share and fellowship and to enrich his life with God.

Thought 1. God knows the believer's needs. The believer does not have to worry about God's knowing or meeting his needs. The believer's concern should be living in the presence of God, taking enough time to share and to fellowship with God. The more he shares and fellowships with God, the more he will know God and learn to trust and to depend upon God's care and promises.

Thought 2. God is the believer's Father. The believer is God's son. The believer can, therefore, *rest* in God and His promises. He does not have to strain and pray long in order for his Father to hear him. His Father already knows and cares. He is to get with His Father for long periods of time sharing and fellowshiping, learning and getting to know his Father intimately.

2. God desires to hear. God knows the believer's need even before the believer asks (see 2 Chr 16:9; Isa 65:24). God desires to hear and answer the believer's prayer, to meet the believer's needs. God desires to work for the believer's deliverance and salvation (see notes, Rom 8:23-27; 8:28-39. This is one of the great passages on assurance and confidence.)
3. God has ordained prayer as the medium through which He blesses and moves among men. (See *Prayer*, Mt. 6:5-6; pt. 2, 1 Th. 5:15-22).

Psa 31:19 *How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.*

Psa 32:10 *Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.*

Psa 34:22 *The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.*

Psa 125:1 *Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.*

Prov 3:5-6 *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*

Prov 29:25 *Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.*

Isa 26:3-4 *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.*

Jer 17:7-8 *“But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” ■*

THE RIGHT MOTIVE FOR FASTING

MATHEW 06:16–18

Introduction — All About Fasting

Fasting means to abstain from food for some religious or spiritual purpose. A study of the fasting practiced by Jesus and by the great leaders of the Bible reveals what God means by fasting. Very simply, fasting means being so consumed with a matter that it becomes more important than food. Therefore, the believer sets food aside *in order to concentrate on seeking God about the matter*. Biblical fasting means more than just abstaining from food; it means to abstain from food in order to concentrate upon God and His answer to a particular matter. Biblical fasting involves prayer, intense supplication before God. Note the words “when you fast” (v. 16, 17). Jesus assumed believers fasted; He expected them to fast. He fasted and He taught fasting (Mt. 4:2), and the early believers fasted (Mt. 17:21; Lk. 2:37; Act. 10:30; 13:3; 14:23; 1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27). Yet so few have continued such intense seeking of the Lord: so few fast, truly fast.

The benefits of fasting are enormous, but there are also dangers. We can fast for the wrong reasons. This is the point of the present passage. Christ counsels us on the wrong and the right motives for fasting.

- I. The wrong way to fast (v. 16).
- II. The right way to fast (vv. 17-18).

I. Mathew 06:16 Fasting — the Wrong Way

The wrong way to fast.

- 1. Fasting as a hypocrite is wrong. Being hypocritical is a real danger when fasting. There are four reasons men fast, and all but one are false and hypocritical.
 - a. Men fast to gain a sense of God’s approval and of self-approval.
 - b. Men fast to fulfill a religious act.
 - c. Men fast to gain religious recognition.
 - d. Men fast to genuinely meet God for some special purpose.

Thought 1. Fasting is not condemned by Christ. Fasting for any purpose other than to meet God is condemned: when you fast, fast “only to your Father” (v. 18).

Mat 6:2 “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

Mat 15:8 “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

Luke 18:12 ‘I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

2 Tim 3:5 *Having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

Isa 29:13 *The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.*

Hosea 6:6 *For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*

2. Fasting for recognition is wrong. It poses several serious dangers that must be guarded against with all diligence.
 - a. The danger of feeling super-spiritual. Few believers follow a true fast. Therefore when they really fast, they have to guard against a sense of super-spirituality and pride.
 - b. The danger of over-confidence. The believer’s confidence is to be in God, not in self. After a genuine fast a believer usually feels spiritually confident, ready to go forth. He must go forth depending upon the strength of Christ and not upon his own energy and effort.
 - c. The danger of sharing one’s fasting experience. The believer has usually learned so much from being in God’s presence that he is anxious to share it, especially with those closest to him. The best advice is to hush: share nothing, not even with one’s dearest friend.
 - d. The danger of changing one’s appearance and the way one acts and behaves. Any change whatsoever from one’s normal behaviour and routine attracts attention and ruins the whole benefit of the fast. As Christ says, “they disfigure their faces” (act super-spiritual) (v. 16).

Mat 23:5 *“Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long.”*

Mat 23:27 *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean.”*

John 7:24 *“Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.”*

2 Cor 10:7 *You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he.*

3. Fasting the wrong way has its reward. A person will receive human recognition and esteem, but the recognition of men is all he will ever receive.

Thought 1 Some gain the control and discipline of their bodies through fasting, but they ruin themselves and their ministry through pride. They lose their reward.

1 Pet 1:24 *For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall.”*

Psa 49:12 *But man, despite his riches, does not endure: he is like the beasts that perish.*

Psa 49:17 *For he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendour will not descend with him.*

Isa 5:14 *Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers.*

Hosea 4:7 *The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful.*

II. Mathew 06: 17–18 Fasting — the Right Way

The right way to fast. As stated in the introduction, fasting means being so consumed with a matter that it becomes more important than food. Therefore, the believer sets food aside *in order to concentrate on seeking* God about the matter. Biblical fasting means more than just abstaining from food; it means to abstain from food in order to concentrate upon God and His answer to a particular matter. Biblical fasting involves prayer, intense supplication before God.

1. Fasting is a duty. Every believer is expected to fast. Christ said, “When you fast.” He expects us to fast.

=> Jesus Himself fasted.

Mat 4:2 *After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.*

=> The apostles were to fast.

Mat 9:15 *Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.” (see Mk. 2:20; Lk. 5:35)*

=> Anna fasted.

Luke 2:37 *And then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.*

=> Church leaders fasted.

Acts 13:2 *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”*

Acts 14:23 *Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*

=> Husbands and wives are expected to fast.

1 Cor 7:5 *Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

=> Paul fasted often.

2 Cor 6:5 *In beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger.*

2 Cor 11:27 *I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.*

2. Fasting is to be done without notice. The believer is to fast before God, not before men. There is to be no change in appearance or behaviour to indicate that he is fasting. Think about it. Why should there be? Why should anyone know that a person is seeking God in a very special way? The matter is God's affair, not man's affair. It is between the person and God, not the person and other people.

Thought 1. What is fasting? It is not to be "obvious to men...but only to your Father" (v. 18). It is to come into God's presence for a very, very special session of prayer.

3. Fasting is to be to God alone. The believer is to fast to God alone. God is the object of his fast. He needs to meet God in a very, very special way. In meeting God all alone, the believer is demonstrating his dependency upon God and His provision.

Thought 1. A religionist fasts before men. A genuine believer fasts before God.

Thought 2. God does not say when or how often we should fast, but He does tell us how to fast. We must take every precaution to fast exactly as He says: before God, in secret, without any ostentation or show whatsoever. No one is to see or know.

4. Fasting the right way has its reward: God shall reward us openly. How much greater is His reward than the recognition of men! God's acceptance and eternal reward is enough for genuine believers.

Mat 6:3-4 *But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

2 Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

2 John 1:8 *Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.*

Rev 22:12 *"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."*

Psa 19:9, 11 *The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

Psa 58:11 *Then men will say, “Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth.”*

Isa 40:10 *See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.*

Isa 62:11 *The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your Saviour comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.’”*

Jer 17:10 *“I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”*

Jer 23:24 *“Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the LORD. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the LORD. ■*

MATHEW 06:17–18 OCCASIONS OF FASTING

There are at least four times when the believer should fast.

1. There are times when the believer feels a special pull, an urge, a call within his heart to get alone with God. This is God’s Spirit moving within his heart. When this happens, nothing — not food, not responsibility — should keep him from getting all alone with God. He should fast as soon as possible.
2. There are times when special needs arise. The needs may concern the believer’s own life or the life of friends, society, the world, or some ministry or mission. Again, nothing should keep the believer from spending a very special time in God’s presence when facing such dire needs.
3. There are times when the believer needs to humble his soul before God. At such times he learns not only humility but dependence upon God (Psa. 35:13).
4. There are times when the believer needs a very special power from God. The Lord promised such power if the believer prayed and fasted (Mt. 17:21; Mk. 9:29). □

MATHEW 06:17–18 THE BENEFITS OF FASTING

Why are believers to fast? There are excellent benefits to fasting, and God wants His people to reap these benefits.

1. Fasting keeps the believer in the presence of God. He is fasting in order to seek God's presence for a very special purpose; he remains in God's presence until he feels God has or is going to meet his need.
2. Fasting humbles the believer's soul before God. It says that God is the most important thing in all the world to him (Psa. 35:13).
3. Fasting teaches the believer dependency upon God. He is seeking God, and in so doing he is demonstrating his conviction that he is dependent upon God.
4. Fasting demonstrates to God (by action) a real seriousness. It shows by act that the matter being considered is a priority.
5. Fasting teaches the believer to control and discipline his life. He does without food in order to gain a greater substance.
6. Fasting keeps the believer from being enslaved by habit. He lays aside all substances; in so doing, he breaks the hold of anything that might have him chained.
7. Fasting helps the believer to stay physically fit. It helps keep him from becoming overweight and soft. □